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7 May 1956

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25X1A USAF

MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT : Longer Term Future of Project AQUATONE

1. THE PROBLEM: Time is growing very near when basic decisions must be made about the ultimate future of Project AQUATONE. The basic question is how long we should plan to continue the project (assuming all goes well) within its present organizational framework. Inevitably this raises a second equally fundamental question as to the manner in which this clandestine intelligence gathering activity is to be organized and carried on in the longer run. These questions must be faced at this time because it will be necessary very soon for planning purposes to know: What sums to include in the Fiscal Year 1958 budget for AQUATONE; How long Agency, Air Force and contractual personnel will be required; Whether and if so when to dispose of the facility at [REDACTED] and how far to proceed with the continued development of the equipment.

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2. BACKGROUND: Several of the factors which have an obvious bearing on these decisions are the present plans of the Air Force and the probable duration of the immediate as well as the policy questions bearing on permanent and long-run arrangements.

a. You will remember that these issues were touched upon in

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a meeting with Secretary Quarles and Mr. Trevor Gardner (then Assistant Secretary of the Air Force) on 14 November 1955. At that time it was decided that pending a study of longer run arrangements, administrative and financial planning would be on the basis that AQUATONE would continue within the present organizational arrangement during Fiscal Year 1957. At 25X1A USAF was also provisionally agreed, however, that [REDACTED] and the Air Force should jointly decide what was to be done thereafter and that this decision should be made in time to permit more permanent arrangements to come into effect by Fiscal Year 1958.

b. Since our discussions of last November, Air Force planning seems to have crystalized in the form of a series of rather specific arrangements of which I have at all times been kept informed but so far as I know have never been discussed with us. A word of explanation of these arrangements is in order. To begin with, the Air Force expects to activate within three months a project BLACKNIGHT which parallels our own but contemplates the use of the B-57-D. This vehicle admittedly has considerably less capability than the U-2. It will be limited to relatively shallow (400-500 miles) penetrations and I am inclined to believe the operation of the B-57-D is regarded as a transitional step. It is important, however, because this project is in the hands of SAC. Next, following the first phase of BLACKNIGHT, some twenty U-2 aircraft being procured by the Air Force [REDACTED] will be 25X1A

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turned over to SAC as they are delivered and SAC is already setting up the organization to receive, maintain and operate these aircraft. They expect to have a first group of four ready for overseas operations by January or February 1957. As the final phase, growing out of these plans, the Air Force expects that on or about July 1957, Project AQUATONE will be turned over to it and that SAC will simply absorb our aircraft and no doubt some of the USAF personnel into its own organization. Hence, SAC would have the only pool of equipment capable of deep penetration overflights and would have the major responsibility of this activity within the Air Force.

c. This summary of USAF planning can be completed by referring to certain already-established activities. Currently both USAF-Europe and USAF-Far East are engaged in overflights employing both the B-57-C (a feather-weighted version of the Canberra) and a reconnaissance version of a jet fighter. Each theater is authorized to conduct overflights within a precisely defined zone. In the Far East, the zone covers most of Manchuria, northeast China and extremely eastern Siberia. The European zone covers the satellites. At the same time SAC is already deeply involved in the overflight business and has just completed some forty odd missions in the month of April alone which surveyed the whole north and northeast coastal areas of Siberia. To maintain control over these activities/the three different operational commands, a small Control Center has been set up in the Pentagon. Standard Air Force procedure requires (a) that overflight programs be approved

in advance by the JCS, the Department of State and
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advance notice of specific missions reach the Pentagon Control Center in time to permit cancellation ~~of~~ or other intervention by the Air Staff if deemed necessary on policy grounds.

d. I believe it is safe to assume that the pattern here outlined is that contemplated by the USAF for the longer run. To summarize: SAC will acquire a capability far greater than that of either of the two Theater Commands and will be the principal operational organization engaging in overflight activities. Control will be exercised through the Pentagon Control Center ~~as~~ in the present fashion.

3. BACKGROUND-DURATION OF THE IMMEDIATE AQUATONE PROGRAM: The second major factor that has a bearing on the problem here under discussion is the probable duration of the intensive overflight activities expected to be initiated about 1 June with the U-2 aircraft. Clearly, this, in turn, depends upon ~~the~~ technical developments which will gradually render this weapons system obsolete, political considerations which may force its termination prematurely, and the extent of the high priority requirement for intelligence that can best be satisfied in this manner.

a. Only a very rough guess is possible as to the date by which the danger of enemy detection and interception will become sufficiently serious to compel the cessation of overflights with the U-2. I would offer the following as the elements of such a guess set down here without supporting justification. Naturally this course assumes a high degree of reliability on our own equipment.

First, I believe with any luck at all it will be two or three months before the

1. Russians have GCI and radar similar in range performance to us. so they will paint and track us. Give them 6 mo. practice on a crash basis and they will vector fighters to us.

2. If Kelly built 10 U-2's in 16 months, USSR on crash basis can build light wgt. plane with few guns, only payload, to get up and intercept us either going in or coming out by full of 1957.

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Russians are firmly convinced that we are flying over them at an altitude pretty well beyond their reach. I would hope, therefore, that a major crash effort on their part to develop high altitude interceptor capability would not begin until next fall. Second, assuming ^{the} ~~that~~ quickest and easiest development that can be undertaken is that of a home ^{ing} air-to-air missile launched from an already-developed type of aircraft at about 55,000 feet, I believe they will require nine to twelve months to have a system operational and installed on three or four prototypes. In other words this should take until early or late autumn of 1957. Third, although there is quite a lot that they can do in the meanwhile to increase the frequency with which they can detect our aircraft with radar, I believe it will take a long time, one and a half to two years, before they can ~~ask~~ track the U-2 aircraft with enough accuracy especially ^{to} in measuring its altitude, to be able to vector in an interceptor successfully. Fourth, finally, even after this technique is developed in a few critical places and after a limited number of interceptors are available it will be a really long time before the Russians ~~a~~ can guard all of their borders. Putting these factors together, I would predict some increase in the risk of interception beginning in late 1957 but a still acceptable degree of safety for probably a year beyond that date.

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b. It is even more difficult to hazard any guess as to the length of time intensive overflight operations will continue to be politically acceptable, even assuming that no aircraft is lost. It must be assumed that the Soviets will detect these activities at least from time to time and that, if long continued, they will contribute to the building up of political tension even in the absence of any diplomatic incident. Our own political authorities have stated the desirability of carrying the operations through as quickly as possible and then halting the activity at least for a time. Moreover, it must be assumed that certain of our allies, at least, will likewise be reluctant to permit long continued operations from their territories. All in all, I would be pleasantly surprised if operations are permitted to continue longer than the autumn of 1957.

c. Intelligence requirements could best be met by indefinitely continuing aerial surveillance of the whole Soviet Bloc but some rule of thumb must be adopted in order to estimate the time that will be required to meet the highest priority requirements. It is suggested that this will require (a) virtually complete coverage of those areas of the USSR that have not been recently overflown and a sizeable area of Communist China; (b) second in thorough some cases ~~third~~ coverage of a pretty extensive list of specific targets and (c) a sizeable number of [REDACTED] missions.

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In theory even this large order could be accomplished in a matter of six or eight months of full scale operation but the typically bad and ~~may~~

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incalculable weather over the USSR will not only lengthen the time required to accomplish a given number of sorties but will also multiply the number of sorties required to achieve a given geographical coverage. The reason, of course, is that many long missions ~~that~~ have to be flown to take advantage of relatively small areas of good visibility. Taking all these circumstances into consideration as well as the fact the third unit will not ~~begin~~ become operational before November 1956, I am sure we will need the summer season of 1957 to accomplish even a major part of what is defined above as essential coverage.

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b. All of the above considerations, then, would seem to indicate that overflights with the U-2 aircraft will probably be conducted into the Autumn of 1957 but that soon thereafter the more urgent needs will have been met and circumstances will be decreasingly favorable to continue intensive operation. This properly corresponds with the planning period we have had in mind from the beginning.

4. The Succeeding Phase: The arrangements we make at this time for the longer run must, of course, be paced to fit the operations that will then be in progress. Present Air Force thinking, as indicated above, seems to be that overflight activity will continue indefinitely. This assumption is inconsistent with the conclusion reached above. In particular, it is not clear that political approval will be forthcoming for continued overflights considering the seriousness with which the decision to initiate such operations is viewed and the already expressed opinion that the operations should not continue indefinitely. Incidentally, the same question may be raised concerning [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Rational planning is difficult in the absence of some assumptions as to the character of the activities that will be permitted in the long run.

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5. Based on the assumption overflights will continue in some form, I repeat personal views I expressed to you last November (on the occasion of our meeting with Quarles and Gardner) as to the way in which I believe these activities should be organized;

(Copy paragraphs 4 a. b. c. and d. from earlier paper)

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